

Investigating the Impact of Kansas City’s Tenant Right to Counsel Program on Eviction Court Outcomes

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Abstract

Many jurisdictions across the US have passed and implemented tenant right to counsel (RTC) laws; however, there is limited empirical evidence on their impact outside of New York City. This study investigates the impact of Kansas City's tenant RTC program, launched in June 2022, on eviction court outcomes. Using a difference-in-differences (DID) design, we compare eviction case outcomes in Kansas City with those in neighboring municipalities before and after the program's implementation. Our analysis shows that the implementation of the RTC program has reduced the probability of default judgment as well as the probability of eviction judgment. Despite expanded capacity, legal service providers remain insufficiently staffed to meet the high demand for representation, highlighting the need for more funding and resources in tenant legal services. This research contributes to the understanding of RTC laws' broader impacts and underscores the necessity for eviction prevention methods beyond RTC for comprehensive tenant protection.

Introduction

Nearly seven out of every 100 renter households in the U.S. face eviction lawsuits annually (Gromis et al., 2022), with Black individuals, individuals with children, and women disproportionately affected (Graetz, Gershenson, Hepburn, et al., 2023; Hepburn et al., 2020). Evictions have profoundly detrimental impacts on individuals' lives, increasing the risk of homelessness, financial hardship, and adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Collinson, Humphries, Mader, et al., 2024; Graetz, Gershenson, Porter, et al., 2023; Vásquez-Vera et al., 2017). Tenants typically face significant disadvantages in eviction court due to a stark imbalance in legal representation compared to landlords (NCCRC, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, rising housing costs, stagnant incomes among the poor, and insufficient federal housing assistance have led to more than half of low-income renter households being cost-burdened, making eviction a frequent occurrence in low-income communities (Desmond, 2022; NLIHC, 2024). In response to this eviction crisis and legal representation disparity, five states, seventeen cities, and one county in the United States passed tenant right-to-counsel (RTC) laws between July 2017 and June 2024, which provide free legal counsel to qualifying tenants facing eviction upon request (Benfer et al., 2025).

Most existing empirical studies on the impact of RTC laws focus on New York City (NYC), the first jurisdiction in the United States to pass a tenant RTC law (Cassidy & Currie, 2023; Collinson, Humphries, Kestelman, et al., 2024; Ellen et al., 2021; Leifheit et al., 2024). The NYC tenant RTC program offers free legal representation in housing court to tenants with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty guideline (Cassidy & Currie, 2023). These studies primarily examine various aspects such as eviction court outcomes (Cassidy & Currie, 2023; Ellen et al., 2021), rental prices (Collinson, Humphries, Kestelman, et al., 2024), and birth outcomes (Leifheit et al., 2024). However, there is a lack of research on RTC laws outside of NYC, particularly in jurisdictions with no eligibility restrictions. There is also a need for research on the impact of RTC laws on other eviction outcomes, such as case duration (Benfer et al., 2025).

This study contributes to the existing literature on the positive impact of RTC programs in improving tenants' court case outcomes while highlighting the resource constraints such programs face. In this study, we investigate the impact of Kansas City's RTC law on five eviction court outcomes: (1) eviction filings, (2) tenant legal representation, (3) default judgments—court decisions in favor of landlords when tenants do not appear in court, (4) eviction judgments—court decisions that allow landlords to take back their property, and (5) the length of the eviction proceeding. Kansas City, Missouri, launched its RTC program in June 2022, offering legal representation to all tenants facing eviction without any eligibility restrictions. We present results from a natural experiment study employing difference-in-differences (DID) regressions and qualitative data collection from legal service providers. Using individual court records from the Missouri Court System, we compare eviction court outcomes in Kansas City (treatment group) to those in geographically encircled and demographically similar municipalities: Raytown and Grandview (control group) before and after RTC implementation. We also interviewed legal service providers in the Kansas City metropolitan area on program implementation details.

The results indicate that the Kansas City's tenant RTC program has reduced the probability of both default judgments and eviction judgments. Qualitative data collected from legal service providers suggest that, while the RTC program's funding has expanded their capacity by increasing the number of attorneys available for tenant representation, this increased capacity is still insufficient to meet the demand. Some tenants who request legal counsel may be turned away due to capacity limitations. Additionally, the service providers mentioned several statewide and countywide initiatives, including the Missouri Tenant Help website, emergency rent assistance programs, and judicial education, which may also have contributed to improved eviction court outcomes for tenants both within and outside of Kansas City. These findings underscore the necessity of a holistic approach to eviction prevention that goes beyond expanding access to legal counsel.

In the following sections, we review the literature on eviction, tenant legal representation, legislative efforts and studies on tenant RTC laws. We then describe the context of Kansas City's tenant RTC program, present our data and methods, elaborate on the results, and discuss study limitations as well as future research directions.

Literature Review

Prevalence and Consequences of Evictions in the US

Each year, approximately 7.6 million people are at risk of court-ordered evictions (Graetz, Gershenson, Hepburn, et al., 2023). This population represents a subset of all renters threatened with displacement by landlords, as many evictions occur outside the court system through extra-judicial means such as improper notices to vacate, lockouts, utility shutoffs, and neglect of property maintenance (Goetz et al., 2025). Eviction filings disproportionately affect Black people, women, and renter households with children (Graetz, Gershenson, Hepburn, et al., 2023; Hepburn et al., 2020). Landlords file eviction cases for various reasons, including nonpayment of rent, lease violations, and, in some instances, without specific cause (Nelson et al., 2021). Among these, nonpayment of rent is the most frequently cited in eviction court cases (Preston & Reina, 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

Eviction has severe consequences for tenants' lives. Eviction filings are recorded by the tenant-screening industry and used by landlords to reject applications, thereby limiting tenants' access to future rental opportunities (Kleysteuber, 2006). Tenants who are evicted through the court system often end up moving to worse-off neighborhoods (Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015). Eviction orders lead to increased homelessness and hospital visits, while simultaneously reducing earnings, durable goods consumption, and access to credit (Collinson, Humphries, Mader, et al., 2024). Populations impacted by eviction

experience increased rates of depression, poorer self-reported health, and elevated mortality rates (Graetz, Gershenson, Porter, et al., 2023; Vásquez-Vera et al., 2017).

Legal Representation Disparities and Their Implications

Tenants are disadvantaged in eviction court due to a stark imbalance in legal representation. In states such as Virginia, Colorado, Hawaii, and Michigan, less than 6% of tenants had legal counsel, whereas over 60% of landlords were represented by a lawyer (NCCRC, 2024). This disparity in legal representation benefits landlords in complex and rapid legal proceedings and exacerbates existing inequities between landlords and tenants (Benfer, 2023; Sabbeth, 2022; Stempel, 2007).

The eviction legal process is complex and can be challenging for tenants to navigate without an attorney's assistance. It begins with the landlord serving a notice to the tenant to either remedy a lease violation or vacate the property. If the tenant does not comply, the landlord can file for eviction in court, which results in a summons for a hearing where both parties present their cases. The judge then makes a decision, and if the eviction is granted, law enforcement issues a final notice to vacate, eventually leading to the removal of the tenant and their belongings. The court sessions are often scheduled during work hours for the convenience of landlords' attorneys, creating additional challenges for tenants, particularly those with inflexible jobs or childcare responsibilities (Desmond, 2016, p. 304; Farrington et al., 2025). Many tenants fail to attend their court hearings due to being unable to take time off work or believing that their case is unwinnable (Golio et al., 2022; E. Larson, 2006). When tenants fail to appear in court, a default judgment is frequently issued, favoring the landlord and leading to an automatic eviction order.

Without the legal knowledge and experience possessed by landlords and their attorneys, self-represented tenants frequently struggle to articulate their cases effectively (Farrington et al., 2025; Golio et al., 2022). Moreover, eviction courts are typically overwhelmed with large caseloads, operating under pressure to process cases quickly, often in ways that systematically disadvantage tenants (Desmond, 2016; Fleming-

Klink et al., 2023). Unwritten rules and inconsistent application of protocols further hinder tenants, particularly those with physical and mental disabilities, making it more difficult to navigate the court system (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023). The use of consent judgments and settlement agreements can exacerbate power imbalances and frequently lead to worse outcomes for tenants (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023; Summers & Steil, 2024).

Having legal representation significantly improves tenants' eviction case outcomes (Cassidy & Currie, 2023; Poppe & Rachlinski, 2015). Attorneys can attend court hearings and trials on behalf of tenants, negotiate better agreements with landlords, and help tenants present counterclaims, ensuring a fair process in an adversarial system (Evicted in Oregon, 2023). Legal representation is especially crucial in eviction filings for lease violations, where tenants have a greater opportunity to mount a defense or present counterclaims compared to nonpayment cases (Wang et al., 2024).

Legislative Developments and Studies on Tenant RTC Laws

Driven by various objectives such as reducing evictions and protecting public health, 24 jurisdictions in the United States passed tenant RTC laws between July 2017 and June 2024 (Benfer et al., 2025). NYC was the first to enact an RTC law on July 20, 2017. Five jurisdictions followed suit between 2019 and 2020. Eleven additional jurisdictions passed their RTC laws during the acute stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when housing stability converged with public health and became a focal point for community organizers and policymakers (Franzese & Thomas, 2021; Parrott & Zandi, 2021). This momentum continued post-COVID-19, with seven jurisdictions passing tenant RTC laws between January 2023 and June 2024.

Although the tenant RTC law has been enacted and implemented in various locations in the United States, empirical studies on its impact have been primarily concentrated on NYC. NYC's tenant RTC is a means-

tested program where a tenant's household income must be 200% or below of the federal poverty guidelines to be eligible. Ellen et al. (2021), using eviction case data in NYC from 2010 to 2019, studied how the sequential rollout of tenant RTC across zip codes affected eviction court outcomes. They found an increase in legal representation and reductions in the share of filings resulting in executed warrants for treated zip codes. Cassidy and Currie (2023), using eviction case data in NYC between 2016 and 2019 and a difference-in-differences design, found that tenants facing eviction filings who receive legal assistance because of the tenant RTC program were less likely to receive eviction judgments, incur lower monetary judgments, have fewer eviction warrants issued against them, and were less likely to be evicted. Other studies have explored the broader impacts of the NYC tenant RTC program, including its effects on rental markets (Collinson, Humphries, Kestelman, et al., 2024) and birth outcomes (Leifheit et al., 2024).

Only two studies examined the impact of tenant RTC on eviction and health outcomes in jurisdictions outside of NYC. Keene et al. (2024) conducted in-depth interviews with over 100 RTC tenants and other stakeholders in Connecticut. Their findings indicated that tenant RTC helped tenants remain in their homes, thereby preventing potential health consequences associated with eviction. Similarly, von Geldern (2025) utilized data from 45 semi-structured interviews and 970 eviction case records and found that legal representation in Washington State alleviated both the psychological and logistical burdens of eviction, thereby reducing the stress tenants faced during legal proceedings. However, similar to NYC's tenant RTC program, the RTC programs in Connecticut and Washington are means-tested, limiting their service to only a subset of the renter population.

Much remains unknown about the impacts of tenant RTC on renters and their communities outside of NYC and for tenant RTC with no eligibility restrictions. No studies have examined the impact of tenant RTC programs implemented in other jurisdictions using quasi-experimental designs. This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating Kansas City's tenant RTC program—one that

provides universal access without eligibility restrictions—and its effects on eviction filings, tenant legal representation, default judgments, eviction judgments, and the duration of eviction case proceedings.

Kansas City Tenant RTC Program Background

Like many other metropolitan areas, Kansas City has been grappling with an eviction crisis (Han, 2025). On average, 42 evictions were filed in court each business day in Jackson County from 1999 to 2018, amounting to about 9,000 eviction filings annually (Raghuveer, 2018). According to the Eviction Lab, nearly half of the residents in Kansas City, Missouri, are renters, with an eviction rate of 6% in pre-COVID years that has been on the rise in the post-COVID era. Before the pandemic, only 3% of tenants had legal representation in court, compared to 85% of landlords and property owners—mirroring national trends (S. Larson, 2022). Even more concerning, in Jackson County (where Kansas City is one of the county seats), 99% of eviction cases filed between 2006 and 2016 were ruled in favor of the landlord (ibid.).

In response to the high rate of eviction filings, disparities in legal representation, and dire eviction outcomes for tenants, a campaign for a RTC law in eviction cases in Kansas City, Missouri was officially launched in 2021 (NCCRC, 2023), led by a coalition that included KC Tenants, Stand Up KC and the Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom, among others. The coalition drafted an ordinance that would provide comprehensive legal protection to all tenants without restrictions on income or household composition, a feature that is not common in all RTC laws (S. Larson, 2022). Through persistent advocacy and community mobilization, their efforts led to the unanimous passage of the ordinance by the city council on December 9, 2021 (City of Kansas City, 2022; Stark, 2021). The municipal government allocated \$2.4 million to fund the tenant RTC program, which officially launched on June 1, 2022 (City of Kansas City, 2024). The program aims to ensure comprehensive legal representation for all tenants facing eviction, regardless of their income level.

For the tenant RTC program, the City of Kansas City contracted Legal Aid of Western Missouri (LAWMO), Heartland Jobs, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) to provide legal representation for tenants (Stark, 2021). Community Care Link (CCL), a local software company, was hired to manage applications and distribute cases to the three legal agencies. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was established with Jackson County, Missouri, to supply a weekly list of eviction filings, which facilitates the weekly mailing of notifications to individuals about the RTC program.

Tenants facing an eviction filing in Jackson County receive a legal assistance information sheet along with their court summons. This document states that pursuant to Kansas City Ordinance No. 211067, if tenants reside in Kansas City, they have the right to an attorney free of charge. Tenants can exercise this right by filling out a request or calling by phone. However, tenants residing outside Kansas City (e.g., in other municipalities within Jackson County) are not guaranteed the same right. This setting allows us to utilize the difference-in-differences (DID) method to evaluate the causal impact of tenant RTC on eviction outcomes.

Data and Methods

This study utilizes eviction court records and qualitative data collection with legal service providers to examine the impact of Kansas City's tenant RTC program on five eviction court outcomes: (1) eviction filings, (2) tenant legal representation, (3) default judgment, (4) eviction judgment, and (5) the duration of eviction proceedings. These outcomes were selected based on data availability and a review of existing literature. Previous studies have analyzed the impact of the 2017 NYC tenant RTC on these five eviction court outcomes in the pre-pandemic period (Cassidy & Currie, 2023; Ellen et al., 2021).

Eviction Court Records

Data on eviction cases filed between January 1, 2018, and May 31, 2024, were collected from the Missouri Courts website.¹ This dataset includes detailed information on case filing dates, dispositions, disposition dates, case docket entries, scanned judgment files, as well as the legal representation and addresses of both plaintiffs (landlords) and defendants (tenants). The eviction filing date and defendant's address enable us to determine whether the case was filed before or after RTC implementation and whether the tenants resided in Kansas City, qualifying them for the RTC program. Filing and disposition dates allow us to assess the length of eviction legal proceedings. This study has obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the authors' home institution (IRB ID #: 202504024). Eviction court records are securely stored in a HIPAA-compliant Box folder and are accessible exclusively to members of the research team.

Case disposition combined with case docket entries and scanned judgment files allows us to determine whether the court issued an eviction judgment, meaning the landlord is entitled to regain possession of the premises. The court website categorizes case dispositions into five types: default judgment, dismissal, consent judgment, tried by court-civil, and other. A default judgment indicates that tenants failed to appear in court, resulting in a ruling in favor of the landlord and an eviction order. A dismissal signifies that the court ruled in favor of the tenants, preventing the landlord from proceeding with the eviction. A consent judgment represents court-approved agreements between landlords and tenants that avoid trials. Evidence suggests that these agreements may not be entirely consensual, as tenants can sometimes be pressured by landlord lawyers without fully understanding their rights (Legal Services of Eastern

¹ The eviction dataset includes publicly available eviction case records between January 1, 2018, and May 31, 2024. Sealed eviction cases are excluded from this study because they are not accessible through the Missouri Courts online portal.

Missouri, 2023). Sometimes, a consent judgment includes terms stating that the landlord shall have restitution of the premises unlawfully possessed, meaning the tenants must move out. Tried by court-civil cases involve a court hearing where a judge reviews evidence from both parties to make a final decision regarding eviction, although the disposition does not directly indicate which party the court ruled in favor of.

For cases with a disposition of Consent Judgment, Tried by Court-Civil, or Other, the eviction judgment cannot be directly determined from the case disposition. These cases constitute about 16% of all eviction cases in our study. To address this, we supplemented our analysis with additional information from docket entries and judgment files. Using the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) tool Tesseract, we extracted text from the scanned judgment PDFs. We then performed regular expression searches to identify key terms indicating eviction judgment, such as “the plaintiff shall have restitution of the premises unlawfully possessed” and “judgment for possession.”

DID Analysis

We employed DID regression models to examine the impact of Kansas City's tenant RTC program on court eviction outcomes. DID is a robust and widely accepted approach for causal inference in observational studies, particularly when random assignment is not feasible (Listl et al., 2016). DID estimates the effect of an intervention by comparing the before-and-after differences between the treatment and control groups. This difference helps isolate the impact of the RTC program from other factors that might be influencing eviction outcomes in both groups over the same period. A key assumption of DID is that, in the absence of the treatment, the treatment and control groups would have followed parallel trends over time. This parallel-trends assumption ensures that any differences in outcomes between the groups are attributable to the intervention rather than to pre-existing differences. To validate this assumption, the study provides graphical diagnostics and statistical tests.

Our analysis compared tenant eviction outcomes in Kansas City, Jackson County (treatment group) to those in Grandview and Raytown, Jackson County (control group). Grandview and Raytown, both municipalities in Jackson County, Missouri, are almost entirely surrounded by the boundaries of Kansas City (Figure 1). This near encirclement creates an ideal natural experiment setting to examine the impact of Kansas City's tenant RTC program. Given their geographic proximity, Grandview and Raytown share similar socioeconomic and demographic characteristics with Kansas City (Table 1). Both Kansas City (treatment area) and Grandview and Raytown (control area) have populations with approximately 45% identifying as Non-Hispanic White, and around 36% identifying as Non-Hispanic Black. Additionally, these areas exhibit similar proportions of college-educated individuals and have comparable average gross rent prices. The housing market dynamics in Kansas City, Grandview, and Raytown are also similar. According to Zillow (2025), these areas exhibit higher-than-national-average buyer demand but have below-national-average median sale prices. In May 2024, the median sale prices were \$241,931 in Kansas City, \$208,431 in Grandview, and \$200,871 in Raytown. Similarly, the rental markets in these areas also show higher-than-national-average renter demand, yet below-national-average median rental prices. In May 2024, the median rents were \$1,362 in Kansas City, \$1,450 in Grandview, and \$1,400 in Raytown.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

[Insert Table 1 Here]

We selected the timeframe from January 2018 to November 2021 as the pre-treatment period, covering the period from before the pandemic to the month preceding the passage of the RTC law. The post-treatment period spans from June 2022 to May 2024, representing the first two years following the implementation of Kansas City's tenant RTC program. We excluded the intermediate period from December 2021 to May 2022, which falls between the passage and implementation of the RTC law, to

prevent the analysis from being influenced by any anticipatory behaviors from tenants or landlords that could confound the results (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

We utilized DID models to evaluate the impact of the RTC program on five key eviction court outcomes: (1) block group eviction filings, (2) the probability of tenants obtaining legal representation, (3) the probability of tenants defaulting on a case, (4) the probability of tenants receiving an eviction judgment, and (5) the number of days from the filing of an eviction case to its disposition. As shown in Figure 3, our conceptual model, we aim to identify parallel trends between the treatment and control groups during the pre-treatment period, with the expectation that one group will eventually undergo the treatment. We monitor these trends over time. Following the implementation of the Kansas City tenant RTC program (the treatment), we analyze the subsequent trends in the five eviction court outcomes. The underlying assumption is that the control group will continue along its pre-treatment trajectory, while the treatment group may exhibit changes—increases or decreases—in response to the RTC implementation. We account for monthly fixed effects in our analysis to control for time-specific unobservable factors.

[Insert Figure 3 Here]

To examine the impact of the tenant RTC program on block group eviction filings, we employ a Negative Binomial DID regression model. Negative Binomial regression is particularly suitable for modeling eviction filing counts in small geographic areas, such as census tracts or census block groups, given that these counts are often right-skewed and contain excessive zeros (Goetz et al., 2025; Goodspeed et al., 2021). The general form of the Negative Binomial DID regression model is as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Post_t + \beta_2 Treatment_i + \beta_3 Post_t \times Treatment_i + \beta_4 RHH_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where:

Y_{it} is the number of eviction filings in block group i at month t .

β_0 is the intercept.

$Post_t$ is a binary variable indicating the post-treatment period (1 if after RTC implementation, 0 if before).

$Treatment_i$ is a binary variable indicating whether the block group i is from the treatment group (Kansas City) or control group (Grandview and Raytown).

$Post_t \times Treatment_i$ is the interaction term representing the effect of the tenant RTC program.

RHH_i is the number of renter households in block group i .

λ_t represents the monthly fixed effects.

ε_{it} is the error term.

To examine the impacts of the tenant RTC program on the probability of tenants obtaining legal representation, the probability of tenants defaulting on a case, the probability of tenants receiving an eviction judgment, and the number of days from the filing of an eviction case to its disposition, we employ linear DID models with a general specification as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Post_t + \beta_2 Treatment_i + \beta_3 Post_t \times Treatment_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

Where:

Y_{it} is the eviction court outcome variable for case i at month t .

β_0 is the intercept.

$Post_t$ is a binary variable indicating the post-treatment period (1 if after RTC implementation, 0 if before).

$Treatment_i$ is a binary variable indicating whether the case i is from the treatment group (Kansas City) or control group (Grandview and Raytown).

$Post_t \times Treatment_i$ is the interaction term representing the effect of the tenant RTC program.

λ_t represents the monthly fixed effects.

ε_{it} is the error term.

For both the negative binomial DID model and the linear DID models, we do not include zip code fixed effects because there is no within-Kansas City variation in treatment status at the zip code level. Prior study in NYC (Cassidy & Currie, 2023) included zip code fixed effects because the NYC tenant RTC program was rolled out selectively to zip codes with the lowest median incomes, creating differential timing and intensity of treatment across zip codes. In Kansas City, the RTC program applies uniformly to all tenants citywide starting from June 1, 2022, so zip code fixed effects are not needed for identification and would add many parameters without corresponding within-zip treatment variation (see Tables S1 and S2 in the supplementary materials).

Qualitative Data from Legal Service Providers

To gain deeper insights into our quantitative findings, we collected qualitative data from legal service providers involved in the tenant RTC program. Specifically, we reached out via email to two of the three legal service providers contracted by the Kansas City government. One provider responded to our inquiries through email, while the other engaged with us via a Zoom conversation. We asked questions about several key aspects of the RTC program designed to gather more details on the program's implementation on the ground: (1) How are attorneys assigned to tenant eviction cases? Understanding the process of attorney assignment—whether it operates on a first-come, first-served basis or prioritizes

certain type of cases—is vital to assess the operational efficiency and equity of the RTC program. (2) What is the current average caseload for attorneys handling these cases? Information regarding the caseload helps identify if attorneys are overburdened, which could affect the quality of legal services provided and the effectiveness of the RTC program. (3) For tenants who do not have a lawyer on record, are there other mechanisms in place through which they are receiving legal advice or support? This question explores whether there are alternate support systems for tenants unable to secure formal legal representation. (4) Are there any ongoing or planned initiatives in Jackson County aimed at eviction prevention? Identifying additional initiatives helps contextualize the RTC program within the broader framework of support. The information gathered from these legal service providers helps us better interpret the results from our quantitative analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the summary statistics for the treatment group (Kansas City) and the control group (Grandview & Raytown). In Kansas City, the tenant legal representation rate—defined as the number of cases where tenants had legal representation per 100 eviction filings—increased significantly from 6.43 to 19.98 after the implementation of RTC. This substantial increase suggests that the tenant RTC program has markedly improved access to legal representation for tenants facing eviction. The default rate in Kansas City—defined as the number of cases with a default judgment per 100 eviction filings—dropped from 45.86 to 37.53 after RTC implementation. Similarly, the eviction judgment rate in Kansas City—defined as the number of cases where tenants received an eviction judgment per 100 eviction filings—decreased from 60.71 to 50.93. In contrast, while there was a slight decline in the legal representation rate in Grandview and Raytown, the default rate in these areas dropped from 41.53 to 37.31 following the implementation of the RTC program. Additionally, the eviction rate in Grandview and Raytown

decreased from 59.81 to 51.84, indicating broader trends of improving eviction case outcomes in the region.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Kansas City Tenant RTC Program Led to Improved Court Case Outcomes

Figure 4 and Table 3 present graphical diagnostics and formal tests of the parallel-trends assumption in the pretreatment period. The results indicate that the parallel-trends assumption is violated for Models (1), (2), and (5) ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests), but holds for Models (3) and (4).²

[Insert Figure 4 Here]

[Insert Table 3 Here]

Table 4 reports the DID estimates for the court eviction outcomes. For Models (3) and (4), where the parallel-trends assumption is satisfied, the implementation of the RTC program in Kansas City in June 2022 led to a 0.0078 decrease in the probability of a default judgment in Kansas City relative to Grandview and Raytown during the same period ($p < 0.001$, two-tailed test) and a 0.0224 decrease in the probability of an eviction judgment ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed test). These changes represent 1.7% and 3.7% reductions from baseline conditions in Kansas City, respectively.

² A parallel trends test with a p-value less than 0.05 suggests that the control group does not provide a valid counterfactual for what the treated group would have done without treatment, leading to an inaccurate estimate of the true causal effect.

For Models (1), (2), and (5), the parallel-trends assumption is violated, so the DID estimates for block-group eviction filings, the probability of tenant legal representation, and case duration cannot be interpreted as causal effects of the RTC program. Instead, they should be viewed as descriptive associations. These estimates suggest that, following implementation of Kansas City’s tenant RTC program, block-group eviction filings were lower, tenants were more likely to have legal representation, and cases took longer to reach disposition, relative to trends in Grandview and Raytown.

[Insert Table 4 Here]

While longer case durations may benefit tenants, our qualitative data from legal service providers and existing literature (Ryan & Armstrong, 2025) highlight important caveats to this assumption. While an attorney can indeed help tenants negotiate for additional time to find new housing (Cassidy & Currie, 2023), prolonging a case can be a double-edged sword. Extended case durations are not always advantageous, as they can lead to increased financial burdens from accrued rent arrears and added stress for the tenants. However, many tenants do need the extra time to secure alternative housing. According to a legal service provider, most clients request more time, although a minority—particularly those with immediate housing options available through family or friends—prefer a quick dismissal.

Limited Capacity of Legal Service Providers

The quantitative analysis indicates that while the Kansas City RTC program significantly increased tenant legal representation to about 20%, substantial gaps remain, with 80% of tenants still unable to secure legal representation in eviction court. Despite the program’s objective to provide sufficient capacity for all tenants requesting legal aid, resource limitations hamper its effectiveness.

Tenants facing eviction can apply online or through a hotline by providing their name, case number, and income information. CCL, the developer of the online tenant request portal, assigns cases to legal service providers on a weekly basis. The assignment process is not entirely random. For example, one of the legal service providers funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) specifically serves low-income individuals, and CCL directs requests from such tenants to that provider. The objective of the RTC program is to have sufficient capacity for every tenant who seeks legal representation, but unfortunately, legal service providers currently lack enough lawyers to fulfill this goal.

The average caseload per attorney ranges from 2 to 4 new cases per week, depending on the complexity of the cases. More challenging cases, such as those involving eviction and habitability issues, take longer to resolve and may require co-counsel. Each legal service organization accepts a certain number of cases each week based on the number of active lawyers available for the right to counsel program. Once the total number of available cases for the week has been assigned, any remaining cases are turned down. One legal service provider estimated that they have to turn down nearly 30% of tenant requests since 2023. For tenants whose requests are declined or who reside outside Kansas City and are thus ineligible for the Kansas City's tenant RTC program, legal service attorneys refer them to the Missouri Tenant Help website and provide information on additional tenant resources.

Court-based outreach efforts have also been constrained by limited resources. In the early stages of the RTC program, one legal service provider mentioned that they had staff set up tables in courthouses in Jackson County to conduct outreach and provide tenant advice. However, they have since had to discontinue this practice due to lack of staff and funding.

Factors Beyond the Tenant RTC Program

Table 2 shows concurrent declines in default and eviction judgment rates in both Kansas City and the control areas of Grandview and Raytown. Qualitative data collection from legal service providers suggests these concurrent trends are likely due to a combination of factors beyond the tenant RTC program. First, the passage of the RTC law has led to increased judicial education regarding tenants' rights for judges in Jackson County courts, resulting in stricter enforcement of regulations. For instance, landlords are required by statute to attach the lease and ledger documents for nonpayment eviction cases. While this requirement was not rigorously enforced in the past, post-RTC implementation has seen a notable change. Local legal service providers have observed that judges now strictly enforce this statute, and if the lease is not provided as an exhibit and the tenant raises this issue, the case is often promptly dismissed. Second, the Missouri Tenant Help website features the Eviction Defense Document Engine (EDDE), which assists tenants in creating their own court documents to fight evictions for free. This online resource help tenants to become more knowledgeable about their rights and has likely contributed to improved court case outcomes. Third, pandemic-era rent relief³ and emergency rent assistance programs have also played a significant role in reducing the rate of eviction judgments in the Kansas City region in recent years. These programs have provided essential financial support to tenants, helping them stay current on rent and avoid eviction judgements.

Discussion & Conclusion

The implementation of the Kansas City Tenant RTC law represents a significant advancement in addressing the legal representation imbalance that tenants face in eviction court. Our study highlights the positive impact the RTC program has had on tenants' eviction court outcomes, including reduced

³ The State Assistance for Housing Relief (SAFHR) program for renters in Missouri was launched in 2021. It ceased accepting new applications on January 31, 2023. SAFHR allocated \$50 million in emergency rental assistance to tenants facing eviction in Jackson County and Kansas City.

probability of default and reduced probability of eviction judgment. The positive outcomes observed in Kansas City highlight the potential benefits of implementing RTC programs in other cities, including cities in red states struggling with high eviction filing rates.⁴ The results are consistent with findings from similar studies on RTC programs in NYC (Cassidy & Currie, 2023; Ellen et al., 2024), Connecticut (Keene et al., 2024), and Washington State (von Geldern, 2025).

Despite the promising improvements, it is evident that the comprehensive approach to eviction prevention necessitates continued and expanded efforts beyond providing legal counsel. Our descriptive statistics reveal a concurrent decline in default and eviction judgments in both Kansas City and the control areas of Grandview and Raytown, likely due to a combination of factors beyond the RTC program. These include enhanced judicial education on tenants' rights leading to stricter enforcement of regulations, tenant resources such as the Missouri Tenant Help website, and pandemic-era rent relief and emergency assistance programs.

Moreover, our findings underscore the challenges faced by legal service providers in meeting the high demand for representation, echoing the observations of Benfer et al. (2025) and emphasizing the need for increased funding support for RTC programs. Although the Kansas City RTC program has successfully raised the rate of tenant legal representation to approximately 20%, substantial gaps remain, as 80% of tenants still lack legal representation in eviction court. While having an attorney is valuable, lawyers alone cannot resolve the fundamental issue of nonpayment of rent (Brodie & Bownman, 2023).

Therefore, initiatives such as emergency rent assistance programs, affordable housing development, rent control, and tenant organizing are crucial to more effective and sustainable eviction prevention outcomes.

⁴ Learning from the Kansas City case, it is crucial for other cities considering a similar path to secure adequate financial resources to meet the high demand for legal representation. Additionally, policymakers must recognize that effectively addressing the affordable housing and eviction crisis requires a systemic approach that integrate various strategies, including but not limited to the RTC program.

Our research has several limitations. First, the exclusion of the semi-treated period (December 2021 to May 2022) from the DID analysis may influence our results. However, this exclusion is necessary as landlord behaviors during this time, influenced by the anticipation of RTC legislation, would not accurately reflect normal trends in the pre-intervention period. Second, due to the relatively recent implementation of the Kansas City tenant RTC program, our data can only capture its short-term impact; understanding the longer-term effects will require ongoing research and comprehensive tracking. Third, we gathered qualitative data from legal service providers but not the tenants they served; more in-depth interviews with tenants facing evictions in Kansas City, Grandview, and Raytown are essential to gain a fuller understanding of the RTC program's impact on tenants' experiences navigating the eviction court systems. Fourth, we currently do not have data on jurisdictions outside of Jackson County, which limits our ability to control for broader judicial changes that might affect eviction outcomes. Our qualitative data suggests that judges in Jackson County have become stricter about enforcing tenant rights regulations in response to the RTC program, benefiting all tenants in the county regardless of their RTC eligibility. This stricter enforcement should be considered an important positive effect of the program. Using Grandview and Raytown (municipalities within Jackson County) as the control group may lead to the underestimation of the RTC program's effectiveness, as improvements in tenant outcomes in these areas may partly result from the spillover effect of the Kansas City RTC program. Conversely, given the limited pool of attorneys in the Kansas City metro area, the RTC program may attract more attorneys to service tenants in Kansas City proper, potentially underserving tenants in other municipalities. This could lead to an overestimation of the RTC program's effectiveness. Future research could consider using eviction court data from jurisdictions outside the Kansas City metro area through a Synthetic Difference-in-Differences design to provide a more robust comparison.

Nevertheless, this study contributes insights into the benefits and limitations of tenant RTC programs, emphasizing that holistic and sustained support is crucial for substantial and enduring change in eviction

court dynamics. Policymakers and stakeholders must consider these aspects to further enhance and refine eviction prevention strategies, ensuring that all tenants have equitable access to justice and housing stability.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Study Area Demographics.

| | Kansas City* | Grandview & Raytown | Difference |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Population | 318,914 (4,053) | 54,928 (1,854) | 263,986*** |
| Proportion of Non-Hispanic White | 0.445 (0.009) | 0.458 (0.026) | -0.013 |
| Proportion of Non-Hispanic Black | 0.361 (0.010) | 0.360 (0.026) | 0.001 |
| Proportion of Non-Hispanic Asian | 0.023 (0.002) | 0.015 (0.003) | 0.008* |
| Proportion of Hispanic | 0.124 (0.006) | 0.112 (0.013) | 0.012 |
| Proportion of Population in Poverty | 0.188 (0.007) | 0.129 (0.014) | 0.059*** |
| Proportion of College-Educated Population | 0.642 (0.011) | 0.583 (0.030) | 0.060 |
| Households | 141,529 (1,559) | 23,377 (704) | 118,152*** |
| Proportion of Renter Households | 0.510 (0.010) | 0.426 (0.027) | 0.084** |
| Average Household Income (\$) | 79,342 (1,470) | 69,934 (3,504) | 9,408* |
| Average Gross Rent (\$) | 1,106 (29) | 1,005 (81) | 101 |
| Average Housing Value (\$) | 213,571 (5,604) | 164,323 (18,988) | 49,248* |

Note: * Kansas City refers specifically to the segment of Kansas City located within Jackson County, Missouri. Standard error in the brackets. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed test).

Data Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

| | | Eviction Filings | Average Monthly Eviction Filing Rate | Tenant Legal Representation Rate | Default Rate | Eviction Judgment Rate | Average Days from Case Filing to Disposition |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Pre-RTC (Jan 2018 - Nov 2021) | Kansas City | 16,139 | 0.48 | 6.43 | 45.86 | 60.71 | 55.64 |
| | Grandview & Raytown | 2,236 | 0.48 | 5.23 | 41.53 | 59.81 | 54.12 |
| Post-RTC (Jun 2022 - May 2024) | Kansas City | 13,313 | 0.77 | 19.98 | 37.53 | 50.93 | 56.87 |
| | Grandview & Raytown | 1,954 | 0.82 | 4.81 | 37.31 | 51.84 | 48.87 |

Notes: Include eviction filings in Kansas City, Grandview, and Raytown, Jackson County, Missouri.

Monthly Eviction Filing Rate = Number of eviction filings per 100 renter households per month.

Tenant Legal Representation Rate = Number of cases where tenants had legal representation per 100 eviction filings.

Default Rate = Number of cases with a default judgment per 100 eviction filings.

Eviction Judgment Rate = Number of cases where tenants with an eviction judgment per 100 eviction filings.

Table 3. Parallel-Trends Test.

| | Parallel-Trends Test (Pretreatment Time Period) | | | | |
|----------|---|---|--|---|---|
| | H0: Trends are Parallel | | | | |
| | Model (1) Block Group Eviction Filings | Model (2) Probability of Tenant Having Legal Representation | Model (3) Probability of Default Judgment | Model (4) Probability of Eviction Judgment | Model (5) Days from Case Filing to Disposition |
| Prob > F | 0.0000 | 0.0225 | 0.2034 | 0.0661 | 0.0418 |

Note: Block Group Eviction Filing Rate = Eviction Filings per 100 Renter Households.

Table 4. DID Estimations.

| | Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATET) | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| | Model (1) Block Group Eviction Filings | Model (2) Probability of Tenant Having Legal Representation | Model (3) Probability of Default Judgment | Model (4) Probability of Eviction Judgment | Model (5) Days from Case Filing to Disposition |
| RTC Implementation | -0.0061* (0.0029) | 0.1441** (0.0003) | -0.0078*** (0.0000) | -0.0224* (0.0005) | 6.4019** (0.0125) |
| N | 26,483 | 33,642 | 33,478 | 33,305 | 33,471 |

Notes: ATET estimate adjusted for monthly time fixed effects. Block Group Eviction Filing Rate = Eviction Filings per 100 Renter Households. Robust standard error in the brackets.

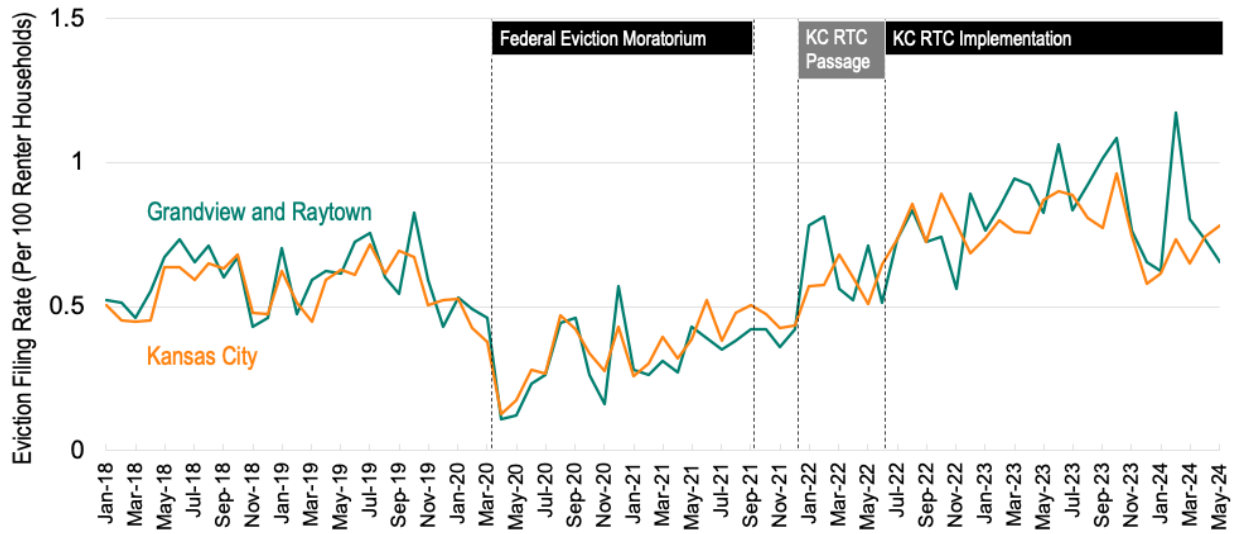
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001 (two-tailed test).

Figure 1. Geographic Location of Kansas City, Grandview, and Raytown within Jackson County.



Note: * Kansas City refers specifically to the segment of Kansas City located within Jackson County, Missouri.

Figure 2. Eviction Filing Rates by Month, 2018-2024.



Note: Include eviction filings in Kansas City, Grandview, and Raytown, Jackson County, Missouri.

Figure 3. Conceptual Diagram of DID models for Kansas City Tenant RTC implementation.

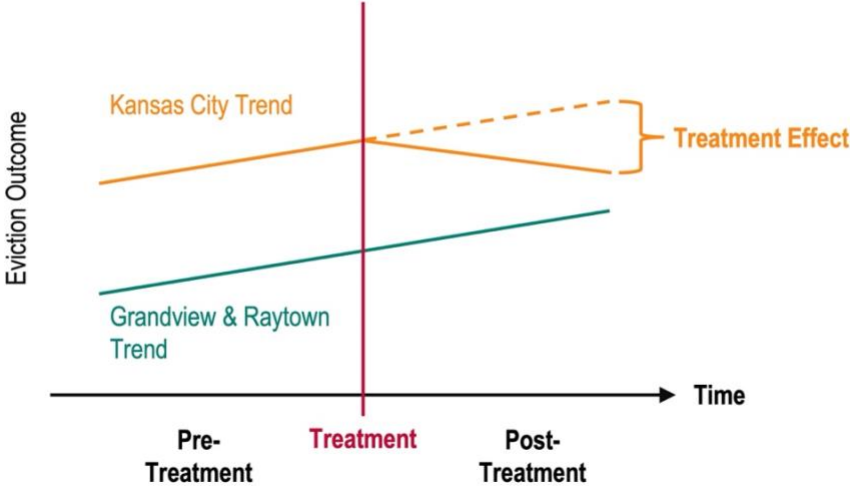
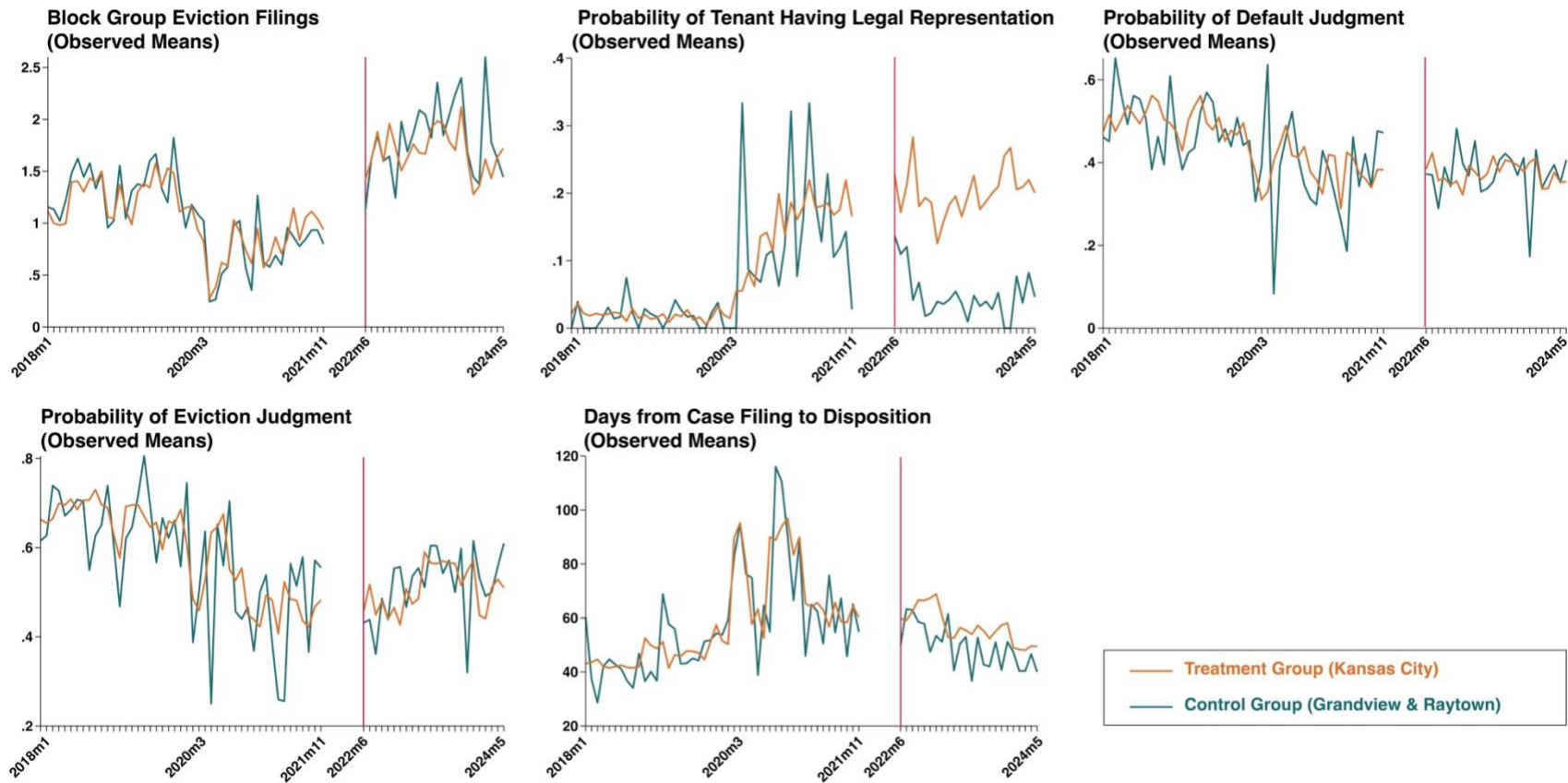


Figure 4. Trends in Eviction Court Outcomes: Treatment Group vs. Control Group.



Note: The vertical red line represents the point of intervention (the start of the Kansas City Tenant Right to Counsel Program).

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